

## Pamphlet by Samuel M. Crothers, undated

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For Ma belle Mabel AG?

AN INTRODUCTION TO UNITARIANISM.

BY REV. SAMUEL M. CROTHERS, D. D.

Read, mark, learn and digest.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION, BOSTON.

Our Faith.

The Fatherhood of God. The Brotherhood of Man. The Leadership of Jesus. Salvation by Character. The Progress of Mankind, onward and upward forever.

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In the love of the truth, and the spirit of Jesus Christ, we unite for the worship of God and the service of man.

Our Declaration

( *As expressed in the By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association* ).

“The object of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity; and all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to unite and co-operate with it for that purpose.”

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( *As expressed by the National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches, at Saratoga, N. Y., in 1894.*  )

“These Churches accept the religion of Jesus, holding, in accordance with his teaching, that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man.

“The Conference recognizes the fact that its constituency is Congregational in tradition and polity. Therefore, it declares that nothing in this Constitution is to be construed as an authoritative test; and we cordially invite to our working fellowship any who, while differing from us in belief, are in general sympathy with our spirit and our practical aims.”

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO UNITARIANISM.**

There are many men and women of high moral purpose and of religious spirit who are outside the churches. They are interested in philanthropy, in education, and in all that concerns the welfare of the community; but they are unable to accept the creeds which are commonly made the conditions of church membership. Many such persons are unaware that there exists any church to which they may belong without giving up their freedom of thought. I wish on behalf of the Unitarian Church to address the isolated liberal thinker. It will be more simple for me to speak to a person rather than to a class. In order that we may at once come to an understanding, let me see if I can tell WHAT YOU ARE. Yes O.K.

You had been educated in an evangelical church where you had been taught what is commonly called The Plan of Salvation. The foundation of this system lay in the Yes belief that God had revealed his full will in the Bible, which was a book of infallible truth. It told how the world was created, how man was created innocent but fell into sin, how at last the Second Person of the Trinity Yes took upon himself our humanity, was born, suffered, and died that those who believe on Him might be saved. All those who did not believe on Him must suffer eternal Yes misery under the wrath of God.

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It was through no will of your own that you doubted first one and then another of these doctrines. The first Yes 4 Yes doctrine to fade away was that of the eternal punishment of unbelievers. The proof texts in the Bible seemed to teach this, and yet it seemed so horribly unjust, so contradictory to the thought that God is love, that you felt Yes that there must be some mistake in the reasoning that would shut out a great part of mankind from all hope. No You had heard that there were heretics called Universalists who stoutly denied the doctrine. You were not ready to become a Universalist, but you were glad when your own minister quietly ignored the dogma.

Yes After a while you saw that there were other mistakes in the system which had been taught you. You got some knowledge of geology, and you saw that it is impossible O.K. any longer to take the account of the creation in Genesis literally. A little reflection showed that the whole account Yes of the fall of man must be given up. At first you tried to think that this had no effect on what seemed more Yes essential, — salvation through the blood of Chr ist. But, after a while, you perceived that the whole plan of redemption Yes depended on the orthodox view of the fall of Yes read it carefully — like scientific book: man . Then you began to study the Bible ane w. You asked, Does the Bible claim to be infallible? If it does, is the claim verified? You discovered that modern scholars have found many undoubted mistakes in it. Along with the loftiest thoughts they have found many human errors. This was, you learned, not a matter of Certainly conjecture but one of plain fa ct.

If the Bible is not infallible can the appeal to proof Certainly not texts really prove anything? Is it any longer possible to rest content with a doctrine merely because it's "scriptural"? Common-sense answered: No.

At this time you received a further shock, when on seeking light on the popular creeds, you discovered that No those who defended them often played fast and loose with words. When you discovered that a creed might 5 be signed with mental reservations, you felt that you No were being trifled with. It was all so different from the Yes the contrast was

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painfully obvious transparent candor with which men of science state the results of their researches. About this time the reports of a "heresy trial" made you look upon the church with The history & the content theology & Latin led to his conclusion in my case. a feeling almost of disgust. A scholar, for stating the conclusions to which his studies led him, was haled before an ecclesiastical court as if he had been guilty of a crime. The church, you said, is an enemy to the truth-seeking spirit, and so you turned away from it. Since then you have been an outsider. You have taken an interest in philanthropic associations; you have read good books; you have given much thought to your own home. In many ways you are conscious that you are more religious Yes in your inner thought than you had been before; but you have no church.

ARE YOU SATISFIED? ?

Personally — Yes — for others — No.

No. Nobody prefers being "an outsider." At first you rather enjoyed it. It was a fine thing to live in the open. You felt only compassion for those who were shut in by a roof. But now you are willing to confess that it is sometimes chilly and always a little lonely, where you are. You begin to realize the feeling of the Ancient Mariner when, after being "alone on the wide, wide sea," he longed for the fellowship of religion.

Oh sweeter than the marriage feast, 'T is sweeter far to me, To walk together to the kirk  
With a goodly company. To walk together to the kirk And all together pray, While each to  
the great Father bends— Old men and babes and loving friends, And youths and maidens  
gay.

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It is that sense of "walking together" that attracts you in the ideal of a church. How beautiful it is to belong to a society based not on wealth, or social distinction, or self-interest, but only on common human needs and aspirations! And when you think of your own Yes children your position as an "outsider" seems to you Always felt that they must go through

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same process as myself — Learn the same errors to begin with — & perhaps — some day out-grow them. The condition of the individual must follow that of the race.— Childhood is the of blind faith — Reason develops slowly — Felt it wisest to let them unlike the ideas of the times without hindrance from me. But! still more unsatisfactory. The church of your childhood Yes was narrow, and you outgrew it; but there were some things you learned there which you have never outgrown. Yes There is a sense of the sanctity of all li fe, that you have carried with you, and which is the best thing you have to-day. You want to communicate that to your children, Yes That is what I have tried to do. and you find it is no easy thing. You need the help of others, you need the proper atmosphere and environment.

And there are occasions of joy and sorrow when you go back to the church. They are the times when you need the sacramental touch to give any meaning to life.

Of another lack you have become conscious, even in your good works. It is the lack of unity. A great many good people are busily engaged in doing a great many kinds of good things. Some are visiting the sick, some are endeavoring to reform politics, some are setting examples of noble integrity in business. How may they be brought together, so that they may encourage one another and present a solid front against the forces of evil? How may they find one common inspiration and feel the glow which comes from fellowship? As it is, they are often lonely and discouraged; how may they be united into one triumphant body?

### THE CHURCH TO WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO BELONG.

That in the church which has irritated and alienated Yes you has been its dogmatism, its narrowness, its tra ditiona lis m. & the childishness & its beliefs. That which attracts you is the idea of a brotherhood 7 based on common human needs and aspiration s. If Yes the Church could only be made to give up the intrusive attempt to dictate a set of opinions to its members, and give itself to the work of developing each one in his own best lif e,

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and encouraging each one in his own endeavors Yes to realize the ideal, what a noble institution it might become! A university needs no formal creed, the love of sound learning is a sufficient bond. Why should not a church be united in the same way? Instead of being a union of those who have the same opinions, let it be the union of those who desire to cultivate to the fullest their moral and spiritual natures, and to share with others the good which they may have discovered. Such a church could have no fear of heresy. One could not really “outgrow” it, for its very purpose is to afford the necessary helps to the fullest individual development. Such a church in any community would afford a meeting-place and a home for all those who were interested in the betterment of the common life. It would, at the same time, be a refuge for the lonely and the discouraged. To “belong to a church” would be the evidence, not of sectarian zeal, but of the broadest humanitarian sympathy.

DO YOU KNOW THAT OTHERS ARE WORKING FOR JUST SUCH AN IDEAL?

Read these words of William Ellery Channing:

These are my sentiments “I desire to escape the narrow walls of a particular church, and to live under the open sky, in the broad light, looking far and wide, seeing with my own eyes, hearing with my own ears, and following truth meekly, but resolutely, however arduous and solitary the path in which she leads.”

So am I Channing, you perceive, was willing, if need be, to walk alone. Happily, however, it was not necessary for him to do so, for he found “a goodly company” ready to walk with him. This was the real meaning of the Unitarian movement of which Channing was the honored leader.

Would like to do this. Know nothing about it. Have been prejudiced against it. It will be worth your while to look up the history of this Unitarian movement. You will find Unitarianism has passed through all the phases of thought or feeling which you have passed through, and is now facing substantially the same ideals. It began in the strictest

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form of Calvinism. These churches in their search for truth have been reluctantly compelled to give up first one and then another of their inherited doctrines So have I — the Trinity, the fall of man, the atonement, the eternal punishment of the unbelievers, at last the infallible authority of the Bible. If you take the trouble you may find out the reasons which forced them to each step. This side of the development was negative, so that Unitarians have often felt themselves to be cut off from the larger fellowship they have desired. But in the exercise of their freedom they have come upon that which has been positive and inspiring.

These things have always impressed me The dignity and worth of human nature; the sacredness of the moral law; the wonderfulness of the tendency to growth and progress; the unity to be discerned in all good things; the prophecies which this present life gives of larger and more perfect life in the future in this world — these are the themes which Unitarian poets and preachers have found most inspiring. All these thoughts find their natural centre in defines the attitude my mind? the thought of God. Unitarians do not attempt to define the Divine Being, but, following the various lines of beauty and truth in the Universe, they find them converging in one Divine Reality. They do not find it necessary to formulate any creed to which all must assent because they believe that the natural impulse of the human soul is religious. Each age and each nation has made its own picture of the Highest and Best. We are, by the same “Men made God in his own image” as Ingersoll said — & said very truly. 9 necessity, making our mental pictures, but the reality must always be greater than our thoughts. To the Unitarian, worship is just this continual reaching out toward the perfect life. The freer we are in our thought and spirit, the more religious we are, if we only keep up the search for that which is beyond.

As to Jesus, Unitarians find it impossible to think of Certainly him as Almighty God, and after a careful study of the records they find the proof of many of the marvels attributed Yes to him inadequate. But as they read the New Testament they are thrilled by his words and his life. Yes Jesus teaches that religion consists in perfect Love — Yes love to God and man. He teaches that religion is natural, its most perfect type being the little

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child. He teaches that there is no need of a mediator between God and man, for a man may go to God just as a child goes to his father. He teaches that religion is a matter not of tradition, but of personal insight, for "the pure in heart see God." He teaches that the true way to learn is by doing. Yes "He that doeth his will shall know of the doctrine."

Such thoughts as these do not need to be enforced by any dogma of infallibility, they need only to be uttered to meet with response. In these words of Jesus, rather than in any doctrine about him, Unitarians rest their faith. Jesus is to them the pioneer of a perfectly free and spiritual religion.

In another way Unitarians have found inspirations which more than make up for what they have lost in breaking away from traditional doctrines. The great social movements of our time have enforced, as never before, the lesson that we are bound together by ties that cannot be broken. We are literally members of one body. Civilization itself is dependent on a religious spirit. We cannot have a true nation without having men and women to whom duty is something sacred. The attempt True 10 to build up the state, the school, the family, brings the realization of religion as something of large public interest. From this standpoint the idea of the Church comes to have a new dignity and importance. It is not an institution standing apart from the state, as if it belonged to another sphere. It has a necessary function in the community; it must train its members to serve the state in the noblest ways.

To know the full thought of modern Unitarians on the varied themes of religion you are referred not to a creed but to the writings of representatives of the faith from Channing and Parker to the present. In reading, you must take for granted one thing: though members of a church, these men are as free as you are. They do not desire to impose their opinions on you, only to help you, if possible, in your search for truth. They welcome honest inquiry: in their church fellowship there is room for honest difference of opinion. They hold with that eminent Unitarian, John Milton, that



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“To be still searching what we do not know by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it, this is the golden rule in theology as in arithmetic, and makes the best harmony in the church, not the formal and outward union of cold, neutral, and inwardly divided minds.”

I have attempted merely to give an introduction to Unitarianism, just as I should introduce two friends who is my case ought to know each other. I fancy that you who have thought your own way out of orthodoxy will find little that is startling in the negative side of Unitarian literature. I think, however, that you may find encouragement in the discovery that what to you has been a lonely way has been travelled by others in “a goodly company.” You may find inspiration, too, in learning that a movement that has always been loyal to the principle of freedom, and which has declared that doubt is not a sin but true the condition of real thinking, has not ended in mere negation, but in a cheerful faith. When you come to examine I doubt whether I have any it you will find that that faith is not very different from that to which you yourself have come.

Is not this something of importance to you? Here are people who are actually organized and at work, endeavoring to realize the ideal of a church of freedom and Yes brotherly kindness, without bigotry and without superstition — the very church of which you had dreamed. They would be stronger for your co-operation; would not you be happier for their fellowship? Respectfully submitted to MGB AGB

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